

Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Kentucky public library computer access vital link to electronic services, resources, says national survey

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FRANKFORT, Ky. – Kentucky public libraries are playing an increasingly important role in providing computer and Internet access, as well as services for people seeking employment, filling out government forms and lacking technology skills, according to a recent national survey on public libraries and electronic government (e-government).

The 2010-2011 Public Library Funding and Technology Access Survey showed that more than 91 percent of Kentucky public libraries indicated they helped patrons access online resources, 81 percent helped people apply for jobs online and 80 percent assisted patrons with creating resumes. All three of these statistics show a significant increase from the 2009-2010 survey and are higher than the 2010-2011 national figures.

“Many Kentuckians depend on their public libraries for access to the Internet. In recent years, public libraries have stepped up to invest in more equipment and infrastructure to better serve the needs of their communities in providing Internet access and electronic resources,” said Wayne Onkst, state librarian and commissioner of the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA)

The survey shows that public libraries continue to be vital community centers that connect citizens to government, jobs and society. More than 79 percent of Kentucky public libraries report that they are the only provider of free computer/Internet access in their communities. Public use of Internet workstations in Kentucky public libraries increased by 73 percent in 2009-2010. In addition, more than 94 percent of Kentucky libraries have wireless availability.

Public libraries bridge the digital divide in a variety of ways. In Kentucky, 94 percent of public libraries offer technical training in their communities, compared with 87 percent nationally.

Contributing to the increase in computers, training and broadband connections at Kentucky public libraries is a \$1.3 million American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) Broadband Technology

Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant provided through the U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the funding has been used to create 45 Public Library Workforce Centers across the state.

“Public libraries have partnered with agencies across the commonwealth to provide resources for job searches and dealing with the tough economy. Free access to the Internet in libraries will continue to be very important in our economic recovery,” said Onkst.

Onkst said that in 2011, a record-breaking 20.1 million visits were made to Kentucky’s local libraries, and many of those visitors used the 4,127 computers that are offered free of charge for public use.

As more government information and forms are posted on the Internet, public libraries are providing an avenue for patrons to find websites and assistance in using them. In Kentucky, the survey reported that more than 85 percent of public libraries said their staff provided assistance to patrons on how to access and use e-government websites, 77 percent helped people apply for or access e-government services and nearly 73 percent helped people complete government forms.

The survey of public libraries was sponsored by the American Library Association and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

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